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Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 109986

FOLLOWING REPEAT LONDON 6269 ACTION SECSTATE INFO TEHRAN DATED APRIL 21, 1978.

QUOTE: C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 06269

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: MASS, PGOV, IR, UK
SUBJECT: FCO ON SITUATION IN IRAN

1. DURING CENTO MINISTERIAL MEETING IN LONDON, NEA ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUNDERS HELD INFORMAL BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS WITH FCO ON THE MIDDLE EAST, DURING WHICH FCO ASSISTANT UNDER SECRETARY WEIR AND IVOR LUCAS DISCUSSED SITUATION IN IRAN WITH US ON APRIL 18. WEIR REPORTED ON A CONVERSATION WHICH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR IN TEHRAN HAD HELD WITH THE SHAH, IN WHICH THE LATTER

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HAD STATED THAT HE WAS EMBARKED ON A LIBERALIZATION PROGRAM WHICH HE WOULD NOT ALLOW ANYTHING TO DEFLECT, THAT HE WOULD PROVE THAT IRAN CAN HAVE FREEDOM OF A KIND, AND THAT THE REGIME IS DELIBERATELY PUBLICIZING THE INCIDENTS IN ORDER TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC. THE BRITISH NOTED THAT THE SHAH HAS BEEN UNWILLING TO INTRODUCE GENUINE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS.

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IN THE SHORT RUN, HE CAN CONTROL THE SITUATION; HOWEVER, A RELIGIOUS REVIVAL BY THE MULLAHS MIGHT LEAD TO AN "ACCIDENTAL" OPPOSITION COALITION WITH THE INTELLECTUAL DISSIDENTS, AND THERE MIGHT BE A GROUNDSWELL THAT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO COPE WITH IN THE LONGER RUN. WEIR FELT THAT THE CAUSES OF THE PRESENT DISTURBANCES HAVE BEEN THE ECONOMIC SLUMP, DISILLUSION WITH THE CORRUPTION IN THE SHAH'S FORM OF GOVERNMENT, AND ALSO A RESULT OF THE SHAH'S TAKING OFF THE LID AND LETTING IN THE ICRC AND AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL.

2. LUCAS, HEAD OF THE FCO MIDDLE EAST DEPT, AMPLIFIED ON WEIR'S EXPOSITION, SPECIFYING THAT THE DISTURBANCES WERE CAUSED BY THE BRAKES BEING PUT ON ECONOMIC EXPANSION,BY HIGHER PRICES AND RENTS, POWER SHORTAGES, AND THE FACT THAT THE SHAH CANNOT DELIVER SOME OF THE GOODS HE PROMISED. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, PEOPLE WILL NOT PUT UP WITH POLITICAL REPRESSION. WHAT IS ENCOURAGING IS THAT THE SHAH IS LOOKING FORWARD, NOT BACKWARD. HOWEVER, HE IS NOT DOING MUCH ABOUT THE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF HIS LIBERAL REFORMS, HE IS MAKING A MISTAKE IN ASCRIBING THE DISTURBANCES TO EXTERNAL FORCES, AND HE MAY BE UNDERESTIMATING THE EFFECT OF RELIGIOUS REVIVAL. THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE IMPROVEMENT IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION BY IRANIAN STANDARDS; HOWEVER, THE SHAH MUST NOT START
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THINKING THAT A TIME WILL COME TO PUT A HALT TO IT. HE IS BEING OBLIGED WILLY-NILLY TO GIVE MORE POWERS TO SOME OF HIS MINISTERS BECAUSE HE CAN'T RUN EVERYTHING HIMSELF; BUT THE PRESENT POWER STRUCTURE IS LIKE A PILLAR RATHER THAN A NORMAL PYRAMID, A "PILLAR STRUCTURE" IN WHICH NO PILLAR IS ABSOLUTELY VITAL AND ALL ARE SET AGAINST THE OTHERS. LUCAS COMMENTED THAT THE DISTURBANCES HAD BEEN THE MOST SERIOUS FOR THE PAST 15 TO 20 YEARS, RESULTING IN THE CREATION OF LOCAL COMMITTEES OF VIGILANTES EVEN IN SMALLER TOWNS. HE THOUGHT THE SECURITY FORCES MIGHT BECOME STRETCHED AND TIRED OF COPING.

STREATOR UNQUOTE VANCE

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